

# **Initial Bison Herd Reduction Environmental Assessment – FAQs**

## **Grand Canyon National Park**

### **1. Where did the bison that are currently in Grand Canyon National Park come from?**

The House Rock bison herd descended from animals brought to northern Arizona in 1906. In 1929, the Arizona Game and Fish Department began managing this bison population in what is now known as the House Rock Wildlife Area on Kaibab National Forest through an interagency agreement signed in 1950, between the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, affected cattle ranchers, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department. For the next 40 years, the bison herd remained largely confined to the House Rock Wildlife Area. Herd size in the 1990s, based on Arizona Game and Fish Department bison counts from 1990 to 1997, ranged from between 69 and 96 head (post hunts).

By the late 1990s, the House Rock bison herd was spending most of its time off of the House Rock Wildlife Area and had migrated onto the North Rim of the park. The most recent year that bison returned to House Rock Wildlife Area was 2009, and now many bison do not leave the park at all or remain close to the park on adjacent Kaibab National Forest.

### **2. What is the estimated size of the bison population on the Kaibab Plateau, including the North Rim of the park?**

Biologists estimate that since the 1990s the House Rock bison herd has grown from approximately 100 bison to between 400 and 600 bison that currently roam the Kaibab Plateau on Grand Canyon National Park and Kaibab National Forest. Most of the House Rock bison herd now spends a majority of its time inside the park. National Park Service modeling suggests that, without additional management action, the House Rock bison herd could grow to nearly 800 bison in the next 3 years and as large as 1,200 to 1,500 animals within 10 years.

### **3. Why did the National Park Service develop this environmental assessment?**

This environmental assessment has been prepared to evaluate actions to quickly reduce the bison population on the North Rim of the park. The National Park Service is concerned about the potential for increasing impacts from the growing House Rock bison herd on park natural and cultural resources such as water, vegetation, soils, and archeological sites; and on values such as visitor experience and wilderness character.

Other agencies involved with bison management on the Kaibab Plateau — the US Forest Service, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the Bureau of Land Management — are also concerned about resource damage from an over-abundant bison population and they are concerned that they cannot meet their bison management goals if the population continues to grow.

### **4. Did the National Park Service work with other agencies in the development of this environmental assessment and how was their input incorporated?**

Yes. The National Park Service has prepared this environmental assessment in cooperation with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the InterTribal Buffalo Council because of their special expertise in managing bison and bison habitat and because of their involvement with bison management on the Kaibab Plateau. As formal cooperating

agencies, they have informed the development of the purpose and need, the proposed action, the no-action alternative, and the impacts analysis.

**5. Which tribes were consulted during development of the environmental assessment and how was their input incorporated?**

The following American Indian Tribes were provided opportunities to consult during the development of this environmental assessment: the Hopi Tribe; Havasupai Tribe; Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians; the Pueblo of Zuni; Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah; Las Vegas Paiute Tribe; Yavapai-Apache Nation; the Hualapai Tribe; San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe; Moapa Band of Paiute Indians; and the Navajo Nation.

Not all of the tribes traditionally associated with Grand Canyon National Park have connections to the North Rim project area, and minimal information exists in the ethnographic literature regarding the connection that these tribes have to bison. Tribal representatives have provided some oral history information and described what role bison play in their respective cultures. Tribes have utilized bison as a food source and bison parts (especially hides, horns and hooves) for ceremonial purposes obtained through trade or hunting. In terms of the affected environment and impacts addressed in this environmental assessment, tribes have expressed concerns about the damage bison may cause to archaeological sites, vegetation and water sources. A summary of ethnographic literature and oral history shared with the park can be found in Appendix B of the environmental assessment.

**6. What action is the National Park Service proposing in this environmental assessment?**

The National Park Service is proposing to reduce the House Rock bison herd to fewer than 200 animals, in collaboration with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the US Forest Service, and the InterTribal Buffalo Council. Given current bison population estimates, reducing the House Rock bison herd to fewer than 200 animals could be achievable over a period of 3 to 5 years.

**7. What tools is the National Park Service proposing to use to reduce the House Rock herd?**

The National Park Service is proposing use of a suite of management tools to reduce the herd on the North Rim. These tools include nonlethal culling using capture of bison in corrals and removal in trailers, and lethal culling using primarily skilled volunteers and tribal personnel. These tools would be implemented in coordination with federal, state and tribal partners. The National Park Service would also coordinate these culling activities occurring inside the park with Arizona Game and Fish Department and US Forest Service management actions (e.g. hunting and habitat management) occurring outside the park to support agency goals for hunting and viewing opportunities on the Kaibab National Forest.

The National Park Service is also proposing use of targeted exclusion fencing in very sensitive areas, hazing or herding and use of attractants, such as food or water, to draw bison into areas where they can be captured in corrals.

**8. Will the public be able to help the National Park Service during lethal culling?**

Yes. Under the preferred alternative, the National Park Service would manage overall lethal culling activities and, in coordination with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, would lead teams consisting primarily of skilled volunteers and tribal personnel to shoot bison. National Park Service staff would supervise teams in the field during bison reduction activities and would provide direction to the teams, including identifying the bison that will be shot. Each lethal culling team would consist of a National Park Service employee and up to four other team members (e.g., skilled volunteers, tribal personnel). Additional people would be able to accompany teams to assist with carcass processing and removal.

Before assisting with lethal culling actions, team members would need to meet requirements that will be established by the National Park Service in collaboration with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Requirements may include demonstrating firearm proficiency and knowledge of public safety and protection policies.

Once a decision related to the action proposed in this environmental assessment is reached, the National Park Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department would provide additional specific information about how to participate in lethal culling of the House Rock bison herd in Grand Canyon National Park.

Opportunities to participate in public hunting outside the park on the Kaibab National Forest will continue to be managed by the Arizona Game and Fish Department in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service.

#### **9. What will the National Park Service do with the bison that are either captured or shot?**

Bison captured live may be transferred to a variety of willing recipients, such as tribes, the state of Arizona, other federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Some bison captured and transferred to the Arizona Game and Fish Department may be released at House Rock Wildlife Area. Any transportation of bison to out-of-state destinations would comply with state requirements for the transport of animals across state lines.

During lethal culling, the National Park Service would make every reasonable effort to remove salvageable meat from the field for beneficial human use and would donate it, as appropriate, to the teams of volunteers who participated in lethal culling and removing carcasses from the field, designated tribal members, and food banks. Other bison parts (e.g., hides, heads, horns) would be either donated to tribal partners or federal or state agencies for non-monetary uses (e.g., tribal ceremonial uses, public or educational display, research), or they would be left in the field. Organ and gut piles may be left in the field for scavengers such as the California condor.

#### **10. Are there concerns over disease transmission from bison to other wildlife or livestock?**

The Arizona Game and Fish Department annually collects blood samples from harvested bison from the House Rock bison herd and the Raymond Wildlife Area herd (another bison herd managed by the Arizona Game and Fish Department in Northern Arizona) to test for Bovine brucellosis, a disease of concern in bison. Bovine brucellosis is a bacterial infection that can cause reproductive problems in cattle and bison and can be transmitted by other wild ungulates such as elk. To date, bovine brucellosis has not been detected from either bison herd. No known disease outbreaks have been reported or observed during annual Arizona Game and Fish Department deer check station inspections of harvested deer either. Likewise, the Arizona Department of Agriculture State Veterinarian's Office indicates that this disease has not been detected in cattle on and around the North Kaibab Plateau.

#### **11. When would the National Park Service implement the initial herd reduction?**

Following the public review and comment period and pending a final decision document related to the actions proposed in this environmental assessment, the National Park Service could begin initial management actions in summer or fall of 2017.

## **12. Does this environmental assessment address bison management following initial herd reduction?**

This environmental assessment focuses on reducing the House Rock bison herd to a level that would protect park resources and values while still allowing for a viable bison population on the Kaibab Plateau. Long-term bison management is outside the scope of this environmental assessment.

Understanding of the possible role of bison on the Kaibab Plateau is evolving, informed by a growing body of science and scholarly work, bison management goals of other agencies, and Department of the Interior policy. Continued dialogue is also needed with American Indian tribes and other federal and state agencies to assess any appropriate long-term, landscape-scale, ecological and cultural roles of bison across the multijurisdictional Kaibab Plateau.

Although outside the scope of this environmental assessment, the National Park Service is committed to continuing to work collaboratively with its cooperators and tribal partners regarding the long-term management of the House Rock bison herd on the Kaibab Plateau.

## **13. How will the input of interested persons and groups (e.g., stakeholders) be obtained and included in the decision-making process?**

The National Park Service has arranged a series of opportunities to encourage public comment and involvement in the plan including three public meetings and a web-based meeting:

- Tuesday, May 16: DoubleTree by Hilton, 1175 W Route 66, Flagstaff, AZ 6 pm-8 pm MST (Arizona)
- Thursday, May 18: Ben Avery Facility- Activities Center, Phoenix, AZ, 5 pm-7 pm MST (Arizona)
- Tuesday, May 23: Holiday Inn Express 217 South 100 East, Kanab, UT 6 pm-8 pm MDT (Utah)/5 pm-7 pm MST (Arizona)
- Tuesday, May 30: Webinar 5 pm-6pm MST (Arizona) (Call-in info TBD)

The public comment period is used to gather public feedback on the environmental assessment. The public is invited to submit comments through June 7, 2017.

To be most helpful, the NPS is seeking your input on:

- the purpose and need for action;
- environmental issues / impact topics analyzed;
- alternatives, including mitigation measures which could reduce potentially harmful effects; and
- the information used to describe the affected environment and environmental consequences.

Comments which are not helpful include those which:

- vote for or against a potential management practice, tool, or alternative without giving reasons why;
- agree or disagree with laws, regulation, or NPS policy;
- discuss other projects or other areas;
- contain vague, open-ended questions.

Interested parties will be able to submit comments either electronically on the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: [http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca\\_bison](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca_bison)

(the preferred method of receiving comments); via U.S. Postal Service at Grand Canyon National Park, PO Box 129, Attn: Bison Management Plan EA, Grand Canyon, AZ 86023; or at one of the in-person public meetings the NPS will be holding during the 30-day scoping period.

Public comments will not be accepted during the web-based meeting; rather participants will be directed to the PEPC web site to enter their comments. Comments will not be accepted by fax, email, or by any method other than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Following this public comment period, the National Park Service will analyze, consider, and respond to all substantive feedback prior to developing and signing a decision document. Responses to comments will be available to the public.